

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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P 101536Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1710

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 0939

EXDIS

STADIS////////////////////////////////

FOR ASST SECY ATHERTON FROM MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PFOR SY US
SUBJ: SYRIAN JEWS

REF: STATE 021820

1. AS YOU HAVE ANTICIPATED IT NOT EASY TO ANSWER MOST OF
THE QUESTIONS RAISED BY SOLARZ AND STONE UNTIL WE HAVE HAD
A BIT OF TIME TO SEE HOW THE NEW DECREE IS IMPLEMENTED BY
THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES. FURTHERMORE, IT IS CLEAR THAT
U.S. JEWISH LEADERS ARE WAY OUT IN FRONT OF SYRIAN JEWISH
COMMUNITY, WHICH WANTS TO TEST DECREE GRADUALLY AND AVOID
THREATENING BY MASSIVE BAIL JUMPING WHAT THEY TELL US THEY
BELIEVE TO BE A STEP FORWARD. HOWEVER, I WOULD MAKE
FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS:

A. WHILE I DID NOT REALIZE SCARCITY OF BLOOD RELATION-
SHIPS IN U.S. WITH PRESENT COMMUNITY IN SYRIA, I IMAGINE
THAT RABBI HECHT WOULD BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY A "COUSIN"
PREPARED WRITE A LETTER INVITING COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHOSE NAMES WE
OR OTHERS COULD FURNISH TO VISIT U.S. I BELIEVE SUCH

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LETTER WOULD BE VERY VALUABLE "PROOF" TO SUPPORT A PASSPORT
APPLICATION, AND AN ALMOST INDISPENSABLE DOCUMENT
FOR A YOUNG UNMARRIED GIRL IN PARTICULAR.

B. SCHOLARSHIPS:

MANY PRIVATE SYRIAN CITIZENS GO TO THE U.S. EACH YEAR USING

FUNDS PROVIDED BY THEIR FAMILIES. TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PRESENT CONSULAR STAFF, THERE NO FIRM PRACTICE THAT SYRIAN STUDENTS PROCEEDING TO THE U.S. MUST PRODUCE EVIDENCE TO THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT OF FUNDS IN HAND TO COVER THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPENSES, UNLIKE, AS I EXPLAINED TO SOLARZ, WHAT A VISA APPLICANT HAD ROUTINELY TO PRESENT TO OUR CONSUL PROVING HIS OR HER BONA FIDES AS A WOULD-BE STUDENT. OBVIOUSLY IN THE CASE OF A COMMUNITY MEMBER, OUR CONSUL WILL ISSUE VISAS TO STUDENTS BEARING THE I-20 WHO HAVE RECEIVED THEIR SYRIAN PASSPORTS AND CONCERNING WHOM HE HAS RECEIVED EVIDENCE OF A SUFFICIENT FINANCIAL GUARANTEE. SUCH EVIDENCE, IN MY OPINION, COULD AND SHOULD BE FURNISHED ENTIRELY IN CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE SYRIAN COMMUNITY IN BROOKLYN AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND THEN POUCHED TO THE EMBASSY HERE. IT IS TRUE THAT IF THIS EMBASSY DISCUSSES USG SCHOLARSHIPS OR EVEN UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS, IT MUST DO SO THROUGH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND WE WOULD HAVE NO CONTROL WHATSOEVER OVER SELECTING THE RECIPIENTS OF THE SCHOLARSHIPS. IN MY OPINION, SELECTIVE SCHOLARSHIP ARRANGEMENTS FOR JEWS ALONE WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE TO THE SARG. AS I EXPLAINED TO SOLARZ, I WOULD URGE ANY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM START ON THE COLLEGE LEVEL AND THEN BROADEN TO SECONDARY SCHOOL BECAUSE LATTER CATEGORY WILL BE MORE ATTENTION CATCHING.

C. BONDS:

THIS IS HARDER TO ANSWER, BUT I DOUBT THAT ARRANGING BONDING WILL PROVE CRITICAL OBSTACLE. I BELIEVE THAT THE MOST PROMISING ARRANGEMENT, INITIALLY, WOULD BE FOR JEWISH COMMUNITY IN U.S. TO REIMBURSE PERSON WHOSE BOND SECRET

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WAS FORFEITED FOR NON-RETURN. ADMITTEDLY, THIS DOES NOT ANSWER COMPLETELY PROBLEM OF PERSON HAS INSUFFICIENT FUNDS IN FIRST PLACE BUT THIS QUESTION CAN BE ADDRESSED AFTER INITIAL FORFEITURES HAVE OCCURRED AND COMMUNITY HAS TESTED REACTION OF SYRIAN AUTHORITIES TO THEM. IN LONGER TERM, FUNDS MIGHT BE MADE AVAILABLE TO SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY COUNCILS OF DAMASCUS, ALEPPO AND QAMISHLI. TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, THESE BONDS, WHICH ARE ALSO REQUIRED OF A WIDE VARIETY OF NON-JEWISH SYRIAN CITIZENS, ARE DEMANDED FROM THE IMMEDIATE FAMILY OF THE TRAVELER. THIS PERHAPS COULD BE ARRANGED SO THAT THE FAMILY IS THE TITULAR GUARANTOR WHILE THE FUNDS ARE HELD IN ESCROW BY THE COMMUNITY COUNCILS. SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT OBVIOUSLY WILL REQUIRE AN ACT OF FAITH ON THE PART OF THE POTENTIAL UNDERWRITERS. MY INSTINCT IS AGAINST DISCUSSING THIS ARRANGEMENT WITH THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT AND I STRONGLY DOUBT THAT A BANKING ARRANGEMENT WITH A SYRIAN BANK, ALL OF WHICH ARE GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED, COULD BE ARRANGED. SUGGEST THAT IDEA OF PASSING THE MONEY THROUGH THE HANDS

OF THE SYRIAN COUNCIL LEADERS BE DISCUSSED WITH SOLARZ, RABBI
HECHT, AND OTHERS CONCERNED.

D. THE UNMARRIED WOMEN:

WE SHOULD BE CAREFUL TO AVOID AUTOMATICALLY ECHOING
THE STATEMENTS OF OTHERS ABOUT ANY SPECIFIC NUMBER OF UN-
MARRIED JEWISH WOMEN WHO WISH TO LEAVE TO FIND HUSBANDS
ABROAD. I DO NOT KNOW WHERE SOLARZ GOT THE NUMBER OF
400. HE MAY HAVE BEEN SPLITTING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
THE 200 WHOM CONGRESSMAN WAXMAN REQUESTED BE ALLOWED TO
DEPART AND THE 600 WHOM MRS WAXMAN UNDERSTOOD MIGHT WANT
TO LEAVE. WOULD ALSO NOTE IN THIS CONNECTION THAT SOME
JEWISH LEADERS TOLD NEWSWEEK CORRESPONDENT WHEN HE WAS
RESEARCHING HIS JANUARY ARTICLE THAT NUMBER OF
"400" WAS EXAGGERATED; BUT HE KEPT THE FIGURE "ABOUT 400"
IN HIS ARTICLE. DCM WAS PRESENT DURING PART OF WAXMAN'S
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DISCUSSION WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS ON THIS SUBJECT AND WAS
TOLD BY ONE COUNCIL MEMBER (DR HASBANI) THAT IN FACT NO
ONE COULD NOW TELL HOW MANY MAIDENS MIGHT WANT TO LEAVE
HP OFFERED CHANCE TO DO SO--EITHER TO PARTICIPATE IN PRE-
ARRANGED MARRIAGES OR TO FIND HUSBANDS OR MERELY TO EMIGRATE.
MORE CONSERVATIVE FAMILIES MIGHT HESITATE TO GIVE

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FOR ASST SECY ATHERTON FROM MURPHY

DAUGHTERS PERMISSION TO LEAVE EVEN IF THEY LEGALLY COULD. WHAT COMMUNITY REALLY WANTED, HASBANI SAID TO DCM, WAS TO BE ABLE TO OBTAIN PASSPORTS FOR, SAY, TWO OR THREE GIRLS PER MONTH FOR WHOM SUITABLE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS HAD BEEN MADE. ONE OTHER COMPLICATION OF WHICH WE AWARE IS THAT SARG FROWNS ON, AND IN SOME CASES HAS FORBIDDEN, TRAVEL OF UNACCOMPANIED, UNMARRIED WOMEN CITIZENS, THIS WITHOUT REGARD TO RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION.

2. RABBI HAMRA VISIT:

IF RABI HAMRA REALLY WANTED TO VISIT U.S., WE ASSUME (BUT CANNOT BE POSITIVE) HE WOULD HAVE NO DIFFICULTY OBTAINING FUNDING FOR TICKET FROM MORE WEALTHY MEMBERS OF COMMUNITY. I BELIEVE HE MAY HAVE BEEN TRYING TELL SOLARZ THAT TIME WAS NOT IN HIS JUDGMENT PROPITIOUS FOR SUCH A VISIT. IF SOLARZ WISHES PURSUE MATTER, HOWEVER, AGREE THAT TICKET SHOULD BE SIMPLY DELIVERED TO RABBI HAMRA THROUGH DAMASCUS AGENT PAN AM. AS I UNDERSTAND CHARLOTTE JACOBSON'S POSITION FROM HER COMMENT TO ME HERE IN LAE DECEMBER, SHE OPPOSED HAMRA'S VISIT BECAUSE SHE FELT THAT HE, LIKE
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RABBIS OF USSR AND EASTERN EUROPE, WERE INEVITABLY PUT INTO EMBARRASSING POSITION OF HAVING TO MAKE PUBLIC STATEMENTS WHEN IN THE STATES. THIS TURNED THEM INTO APOLOGISTS FOR THEIR REGIMES AND GENERALLY DIMINISHED THEIR STATURE. I DO NOT BELIEVE SARG WOULD OBJECT TO HIS VISIT. I SEE IT AS POTENTIALLY USEFUL IN WORKING OUT ARRANGEMENTS SUCH AS FINDING "RELATIVES" AND DISCUSSING BONDING.

3. PLEASE CAUTION REPRESENTATIVE SOLARZ, HOWEVER, ABOUT CORRESPONDING WITH RABBI HAMRA. WITH ALL THE POSITIVE CHANGES WHICH HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, WE ARE NOT OUT OF THE WOODS. THE RABBI DOES NOT NEED LETTERS FROM AN AMERICAN CONGRESSMAN COMING THROUGH THE SYRIAN HAILS NOR SHOULD THE EMBASSY BE DELIVERING SUCH. THE PAN AM AGENT KNOWS WHERE RABBI HAMRA LIVES AND THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO PROBLEM COMMUNICATING WITH THIS WELL KNOWN COMMUNITY FIGURE.

4. WE HAVE NO BASIS TO COMMENT ON SENATOR STONE'S QUESTION AT PRESENT. IT IS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT THERE HAVE BEEN CASES WHERE TRAVEL PERMISSION HAS BEEN GRANTED TO THE FATHER, MOTHER, AND CHILDREN. WE KNOW OF NO CASES WHERE WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED AN EXTENDED FAMILY HAS APPLIED TO TRAVEL. WE ALSO HEAR OF OTHER CASES, NON-JEWISH AS WELL

AS JEWISH, IN WHICH TRAVEL HAS BEEN APPROVED FOR ONLY PART OF THE FAMILY WITH THE OTHERS EFFECTIVELY BEING KEPT BEHIND AS HOSTAGES.

5. IN SUM, I WANT TO UNDERLINE ONCE AGAIN, WE MUST ALL KEEP IN MIND THIS REMAINS A SENSITIVE ISSUE IN SYRIA. THE MORE QUIETLY TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE WORKED OUT, THE BETTER. I KNOW THAT REPRESENTATIVE SOLARZ AND SENATOR STONE WOULD NOT WANT TO FIND THAT TOO MUCH PUBLICITY OR PRESSURE ON THIS ISSUE RESULTED IN THE SLOWDOWN OR SUSPENSION OF A PROGRAM (WHICH IN FACT HAS NOT YET GOTTEN UNDERWAY). WE KNOW FROM CONTACT WITH THE
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COMMUNITY SUBSEQUENT TO ITS HAVING BEEN INFORMED OF THE DECREE THAT IT HAS ADOPTED A CAUTIOUS, GO SLOW ATTITUDE TOWARDS IT. (TOUTAH-PELLETREAU MEMCON OF JANUARY 23). I BELIEVE WE SHOULD LET THE COMMUNITY TEST THE WATER AT ITS OWN SPEED, LETTING IT KNOW AS WE HAVE BEEN, THAT WE ARE READY TO FACILITATE U.S. VISA ISSUANCE. WHEN COMMUNITY, ITSELF, BEGINS TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN AND FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH PROVISIONS OF DECREE, TIME WILL BE APPROPRIATE TO DISCUSS OTHER FACILITATIVE MEASURES.

6. I CONTINUE TO BELIEVE IT WOULD BE USEFUL, AS REQUESTED IN REPORT OF MY MEETING WITH SHOEFI (DAMASCUS 0306), IF I COULD BE AUTHORIZED EXPRESS TO APPROPRIATE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS OUR STAFFS ACTION WITH ISSUANCE OF DECREE AND OUR HOPE THAT IT WILL BE RAPIDLY AND FULLY PUT INTO EFFECT. I HAVE SAID AS MUCH ALREADY TO SHIHABI WHO CAUTIONED ME FEBRUARY 8, IN REFERENCE TO THE PRESIDENTIAL DECREE ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, THAT SYRIAN BUREAUCRACY ALWAYS NEEDED TIME TO ABSORB ANY CHANGE IN EXISTING REGULATIONS. I TOLD HIM I WAS THINKING OF GETTING WORD INITIALLY TO THOSE AMERICAN CITIZENS WITH RELATIVES HERE THAT THEY SHOULD WRITE ENCOURAGING THEIR SYRIAN RELATIVES TO APPLY FOR A PASSPORT TO VISIT THE STATES. (I WILL BE WORKING FROM THE LIST OF 96 NAMES SENT US BY NEA/ARN IN JULY 1975.) I SAID I WOULD BE BRINGING TO HIS ATTENTION ANY PROBLEMS WHICH I BECAME AWARE OF CAUSED BY SYRIAN BUREAUCRACY. HE READILY AGREED HELP OUT IN SUCH CASES.

7. I EXPECT TO BE DISCUSSING THE WHOLE QUESTION IN DETAIL WITH GEORGE GRUEN OF AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE WHO HAS JUST ARRIVED IN DAMASCUS AND WILL REPORT FURTHER IDEAS AND REACTIONS AFTER HIS VISIT.
MURPHY

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